

## EQUIVALENCY CREDIT FOR JROTC

JUNIOR ROTC (JROTC) is a unique and special environment unlike any other high school course—it uses selected military skills and traditions to motivate young people to be better students and citizens. It involves a lot of hands-on activities and places cadets in leadership roles where they learn by doing. Arguably, *all* kids could benefit from this course, yet many shy away from it. How can we encourage more kids to take JROTC? Here are two good ways: (1) expose as many kids as possible to the program and (2) give those that stay in it equivalency credit towards graduation requirements in core courses.

Some believe that JROTC can be useful only if military service is a possibility, while others view it as a place for “at risk” kids who need more structure and discipline in their lives. Others think it’s too time consuming, and for good reason: if taken all four years at Russellville High School (RHS), JROTC amounts to six of a student’s 32 blocks of instruction, or nearly 20% of the curriculum—a large investment. College bound students especially could justifiably feel that’s too much time away from the four core areas of math, science, English, and social studies. While all of these are essential to a well-rounded education, especially for college bound kids, JROTC has excellent blocks of instruction in one of them, social studies, as well as other key subjects. Besides four years of government, history, and health & physical education, JROTC teaches things not covered well (or at all) in other classes, such as citizenship, character education, and leadership. If these latter three subjects are important, and there is an abundance of evidence suggesting that they are, then more should be done to encourage students from across the educational spectrum to enroll in the one course that addresses them.

The reality of the situation in JROTC has been a majority of cadets from the lower realm of academic achievement. Although not a new subject at RHS, JROTC is only in its second year as an independent program at our high school. Until July 1, 2000, RHS JROTC had been a satellite of Logan County High School’s program for the previous five years. That meant there was only one instructor here whose time was divided between all four levels of cadets—freshmen (Leadership Evaluation & Training, or “LET”, level 1) to senior (LET 4). Besides *all* of the teaching, that one instructor had to also shoulder *all* of the administration, extracurricular activities, supply actions, and accountability procedures. In that situation the program could only be sustained at an apprentice level because there are only so many hours in a day and week. That meant that academics took a back seat to the routine functions of military skills training, housekeeping, and service to the school and community. Consequently, the program attracted cadets who saw it primarily as an escape from more academic pursuits. Nor surprisingly, many of the cadets were a discipline challenge and the Army Instructor drew heavily upon his drill sergeant experience to control and guide them. Although he was very effective, winning the respect and admiration of most cadets and helping many with basic life skills, academic expectations were not high. That changed with the establishment of an independent program at RHS.

With the addition of a Senior Army Instructor and other resources, the JROTC program at RHS is expected to move to the next level. That means, among other things, higher academic standards. Not just covering *more* of the curriculum outlined in the Army’s Program of Instruction (POI), but covering that curriculum *more comprehensively*. How can we motivate relatively low achieving students to embrace a more academically rigorous program? As it turns out, it is an opportune time to take that leap to the next level: Cadet Command’s new curriculum for School Year (SY) 2002-03, combined with recent innovations in materials and instructor

training, are at the cutting edge of education theory and practice. We have the tools to challenge and motivate cadets to achieve at a higher level.

New curriculum, material, and training, however, aren't all that's required. JROTC needs to attract more students from the upper realm of academic achievement. With a more balanced mix of students representing *the entire* educational spectrum a more positive influence can be exerted on the academically challenged and undisciplined kids. It could be argued that, because of JROTC's unique and special environment, we would have a better chance of succeeding in this regard than traditional classes. But how can we attract the better students? A very good way would be to give students taking JROTC credit towards required core courses.

To get credit for core subjects, JROTC must meet the same requirements that courses in those disciplines do. The curriculum must address Kentucky's core content of academic expectations, and assessment must validate achievement of learning outcomes. This is what JROTC's new curriculum, material, and training provide for.

Students who take JROTC all four years at RHS currently get six elective credits. Let's look at what core subjects are covered in those six semesters of instruction. Table 1, below, shows the new POI (adjusted for local priorities). In four years, cadets receive 240 hours of

Table 1

	<b><u>PROGRAM OF INSTRUCTION</u></b>						
	<b><u>LET 1</u></b>	<b><u>LET 2</u></b>	<b><u>LET 3</u></b>	<b><u>LET 4</u></b>	<b><u>LET 7*</u></b>	<b><u>LET 8*</u></b>	<b><u>TOTAL</u></b>
Introduction to JROTC:							
A Character and Leadership Development Program	14	0	10	0			<b>24</b>
Foundations for Success	20	30	20	20			<b>90</b>
Leadership Theory and Application	30	30	30	30	30	30	<b>180</b>
Wellness, Fitness and First Aid	40	40	40	40	40	40	<b>240</b>
Geography and Earth Science	12	12	10	10	20	20	<b>84</b>
Citizenship and American History	20	20	20	20	20	20	<b>120</b>
MANDATORY TRAINING	<b>136</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>120</b>	
ELECTIVE HOURS/SERVICE LEARNING/ TESTING/ADMIN TIME:	44	48	50	60	60	60	
<b>GRAND TOTAL:</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>180</b>	

\*LET 7 is second semester of LET 3 (Junior) year; LET 8 is second semester of LET 4 (Senior) year.

(All numbers are hours of instruction, with 180 equaling a complete course.)

Wellness, Fitness & First Aid, well above the 180 in a normal semester class. The list at Tab A shows how this unit of instruction compares to RHS Curriculum Alignment in Health/Practical Living and Physical Education. While every *statement* of Kentucky's core content is not covered specifically, each *area* is addressed by multiple JROTC lessons. For instance, there are no JROTC lessons on human reproduction and development (PL-H-1.2.1) or sexual activity (PL-H-1.2.2). But the over-arching academic expectation (students demonstrate skills that promote individual well being and healthy family relationships) and the other three core content statements in the area of individual well being are covered by 18 separate lessons. In the areas of physical and mental wellness, JROTC does not cover physiology, diseases, or mental illness, but it does teach hygiene and sanitation, nutrition, exercise, and first aid, among others.

Table 1 also shows cadets receiving 204 hours of instruction in history and geography over the four years of study. The list at Tab B shows how these units of instruction compare to RHS Curriculum Alignment in Social Studies. A total of 76 lessons cover the five areas of Government and Civics, Culture and Society, Economics, Geography, and History. As in Health and PE, not every statement of core content is covered, but all of the academic expectations are addressed.

There is no requirement for a course to cover all, or a certain number, of core content statements. However, this is what students are assessed on, so how many core content statements are addressed and how well they are addressed is an important issue. Although a lot of Health & PE and Social Studies are covered by JROTC, and JROTC's curriculum in these areas is very good, the fact that there are core content statements not specifically addressed raises a concern. Another concern is the timing of instruction. Social Studies is assessed junior year; Health and PE are both assessed sophomore year. JROTC instruction at RHS is divided over four years, with two thirds of it being junior and senior years. If core credit in Social Studies and Health & PE was given for JROTC, then students who took it might not be as prepared for assessment in those subjects as they could be.

That does not mean credit should not be given. RHS requires only 15 core subjects and 11 electives, or 24 credits, to graduate, yet in our four-by-four block scheduling system students take 32 classes. That fact leads to a number of problems, not the least of which are lack of motivation and poorer attendance. Seniors often need only one course (senior English) to graduate. They tend to be absent more than underclassmen and some even see it as having the freedom to fail. Needless to say, in this environment discipline becomes more of an issue. This is an especially worrisome situation for those going on to college—some of them will not develop the right study habits or work ethic to succeed in post-secondary education. The administration recognizes this problem and is looking at ways to fix it.

One option is to increase the number of credits to graduate. Two areas that are excellent candidates for increased graduation requirements are the ones discussed in this paper: Social

Table 2

**PROPOSED JROTC SCHEDULE OF CREDITS**

<u>Course</u>	<u>Elective Credit</u>	<u>Social Studies Credit</u>	<u>H&amp;PE Credit</u>	<u>Total</u>
LET 1	1.0			1.0
LET 2	1.0			1.0
LET 3	.5	.25	.25	1.0
LET 7*	.5	.25	.25	1.0
LET 4	.5	.25	.25	1.0
LET 8*	<u>.5</u>	<u>.25</u>	<u>.25</u>	<u>1.0</u>
TOTAL	4.0	1.0	1.0	6.0

\*LET 7 is second semester of LET 3 (Junior) year; LET 8 is second semester of LET 4 (Senior) year.

Studies and Health & PE (see Table 2). Currently, only three (3) Social Studies credits and one (1) combined Health & PE credit are required. If that were raised to (4) and (2), JROTC could satisfy both for students enrolled all six semesters and no additional teachers, classrooms, or other resources would be required. That would provide a big incentive for students to take JROTC and stay in it. Additionally, as the fourth elective in Social Studies and the second in Health & PE, JROTC would *enhance* student preparation for assessment in those areas rather than supplant it.

A Second Region, U.S. Army Cadet Command memorandum dated 17 February 1998 (Tab C), states that then-new Kentucky Department of Education policy allows local school boards to give graduation credit for interdisciplinary courses (such as JROTC) "...if the alternative course provides rigorous content and addresses the same academic expectations." Academic expectations have already been discussed and are addressed in Tabs A and B. Validating rigor and content would require presentation of the curriculum to the two department heads here at the high school or to the central office, as directed, for approval. A system for tracking cumulative performance each semester and at the end of six semesters would also be necessary. Mid-term and/or final exams each semester would have a section on SS and H&PE with a separate, stand-alone grade to validate the achievement of learning outcomes. JROTC would keep a running grade for SS and H&PE separately from each semester's LET grade. Equivalent credit would depend on a passing grade in the respective discipline.

There is precedent for giving equivalent academic credit for JROTC. In Tennessee, all schools get Government and Health/Wellness credit for LET 3 and LET 2, respectively. Several high schools in Kentucky give some combination of credit for Health/Wellness, PE, and/or Government, including Belfry, Bullitt Central, Ft. Campbell, Henderson County, Louisville Male, Millard, Muhlenberg North, Rockcastle, Warren Central, Wayne County, and Whitley County. Although JROTC's broad curriculum seems to fit better into Social Studies, credit for Government or Geography rather than SS would be acceptable as long as it counted as a SS elective.

When I polled JROTC instructors in our brigade (all programs in KY, TN and OH), asking each if getting core credit towards graduation requirements would encourage enrollment in JROTC, every respondent replied that it would, some emphatically. If core equivalency credit is granted, guidance counselors could be depended upon to guide a number of incoming freshmen in that direction. But some would resist, falling back on their notion that JROTC is for those considering joining the military after graduation, or the perception that it's a place for "at risk" kids who need more structure and discipline. Some wouldn't have a good reason not to enroll, they'd just say it's not for them. If administrators truly believe that JROTC can be good for *all* kids, and if JROTC is confident that it can win over some of the doubters with its unique and special environment, then more should be done to expose a greater number of kids to the course.

Like many schools, Russellville High School looks for ways to engage students in the learning process. If students can be engaged, if they become interested or involved to the point that they actually seek knowledge and opportunities to acquire it on their own, they will be more likely to reach their fullest potential. Engagement is easier if kids are properly prepared, possessing the skills necessary to listen and learn. JROTC can help with that process. Besides having a structured environment with a lot of hands-on activities that stress discipline, JROTC has curriculum available that could strengthen the body of incoming freshmen as a whole to succeed in high school. Examples of this curriculum are:

- Good study habits
- Reading, writing, and communication skills
- Test taking techniques
- Winning Colors®
- Time management
- Goal setting
- Decision making and problem solving
- Self-awareness and personal growth
- Brain structure and function
- Multiple intelligences
- Unlocking Your Potential®
- Becoming an active learner
- Conflict resolution
- Career choices.

If the LET 1 course was tailored to include the best of this curriculum, JROTC's LET 1 course could be aptly named *How to Succeed at Russellville High School*, a class all freshmen should take. With fewer than 100 incoming freshmen each year, all of them could probably be placed in JROTC without major scheduling conflicts.

If JROTC is a good course that can benefit all students, then *how can we encourage more kids to take it?* First, by turning the LET 1 course into a *How to Succeed at Russellville High School* class and highly encouraging all freshmen to take it, increasing JROTC's exposure. It would then be up to JROTC to sell itself, but offering those that stay in it equivalency credit towards graduation requirements in Social Studies and Health & PE would be a powerful incentive.

JROTC is setting its sights on higher achievement for all students. Those that leave after LET 1 would hopefully be more motivated and empowered to reach for their highest potential. Those that stayed would have a program of studies and activities more rigorous than in the past but would be rewarded with more academic credit. Of course, not all students, inside or outside the program, are capable of rising to the challenge of higher achievement. But for those in the program, these initiatives should increase the ratio of higher achieving students and set their sights higher, giving them a better chance of "pulling up" the lower achievers to the next level. That would improve the quality of all facets of the program and, in turn, raise the standards of the school. It would also help JROTC attract not only the good kids, but those considered "at risk" who recognize the need for something better in their lives, and who see JROTC as a way to get there.